

HOW TO ORGANIZE A COMMUNITY EXCHANGE

A community exchange is a wonderful tool to bring people together who have similar interests and to build connections between neighbors. Here are some steps to get you started:

1. Decide on a theme. Would residents enjoy exchanging plants, books, cookies, toys? Be creative. Talk to people; find out what interests them. If you are targeting seniors, perhaps they would be more interested in books. If you are targeting children, toys would be fun. During the holidays, a cookie exchange may be just the thing.
2. Set a date and time. What would be most convenient for your guests? Seniors may be more willing to attend on a week day during the day, but working adults may prefer the evening or a weekend.
3. Find a location. Depending on availability, this may influence the event date. What meeting places do you have available in your neighborhood? Consider using church fellowship halls, school cafeterias or gymnasiums, library meeting rooms, the Shoreline-Lake Forest Park Senior Center, Richmond Highlands Recreation Center, Shoreline Conference Center, Spartan Recreation Center, Shoreline Fire Department meeting room at main headquarters, club houses, apartment cabanas, restaurant banquet rooms or a private residence. Some of these options have rental fees. Is there someone in your community who is a member of one of these organizations and can secure the site for free or a reduced rate? Is the organization willing to donate use of the site? Reserve the location.
4. Make sure you have enough chairs for all your guests. If you need to borrow, see if a local church is willing to loan them to you. Arrange chairs in a circle, so everyone can be seen and heard.
5. Publicize your event (see section entitled "Publicity"). If there is a price or quantity minimum/maximum, be sure to specify this in your literature. If you want guests to pre-register, list a contact name and number or email address.
6. Line up volunteers (see section on "How to Recruit and Retain Volunteers") — for facilities, publicity, refreshments, speaker, set up and clean up. Have people lined up to greet guests, introduce people, and start conversations.
7. Decide on the format for your event. Do you want guests to sign up in advance so you know how many people to expect? Do you want to serve light refreshments, such as cookies and a beverage? (If it is a cookie exchange, have people bring a few extra cookies to share for refreshments.) Do you want to provide a speaker to give a presentation related to the theme? How will you organize the exchange?
8. If you decide to have a speaker, ask around to see if there is someone in your neighborhood who is knowledgeable about the topic. Check with professional organizations or clubs to see if they have someone who would be willing to talk to your group. People who are passionate about a subject are often willing to share their knowledge for free. Depending on the number of people attending and size of the room, you may need to provide a microphone for the speaker.
9. Here is one way to organize your exchange. This is just one idea; depending on your theme and circumstances, you may want to revise this. When guests arrive, have them put on a name tag and place their exchange item on a chair in the circle. Allow time for the guests to mingle and enjoy refreshments. Have guests take their seat and introduce the speaker. At the conclusion of

his/her presentation, go around the circle and have each guest introduce themselves and display and talk about the exchange item they brought. Put slips of paper with numbers equal to the number of guests in a container. Have each guest draw a number. Starting with number one, have each guest choose an item from another person to take home.

10. If you are hosting a cookie exchange, have each person bring a specified number of cookies prepackaged into groups of a dozen. Each person will be allowed to take home a variety of cookies equal to the number they brought.
11. A week before the event, confirm all the arrangements. Check with volunteers to make sure everything is ready to go.
12. After the event, make sure you return your facility to its original condition (or better!).
13. Conduct a debriefing with those involved in the event. Determine what went well and what you would change. Encourage volunteers to give input and then use some of their ideas. Keep notes for future use.